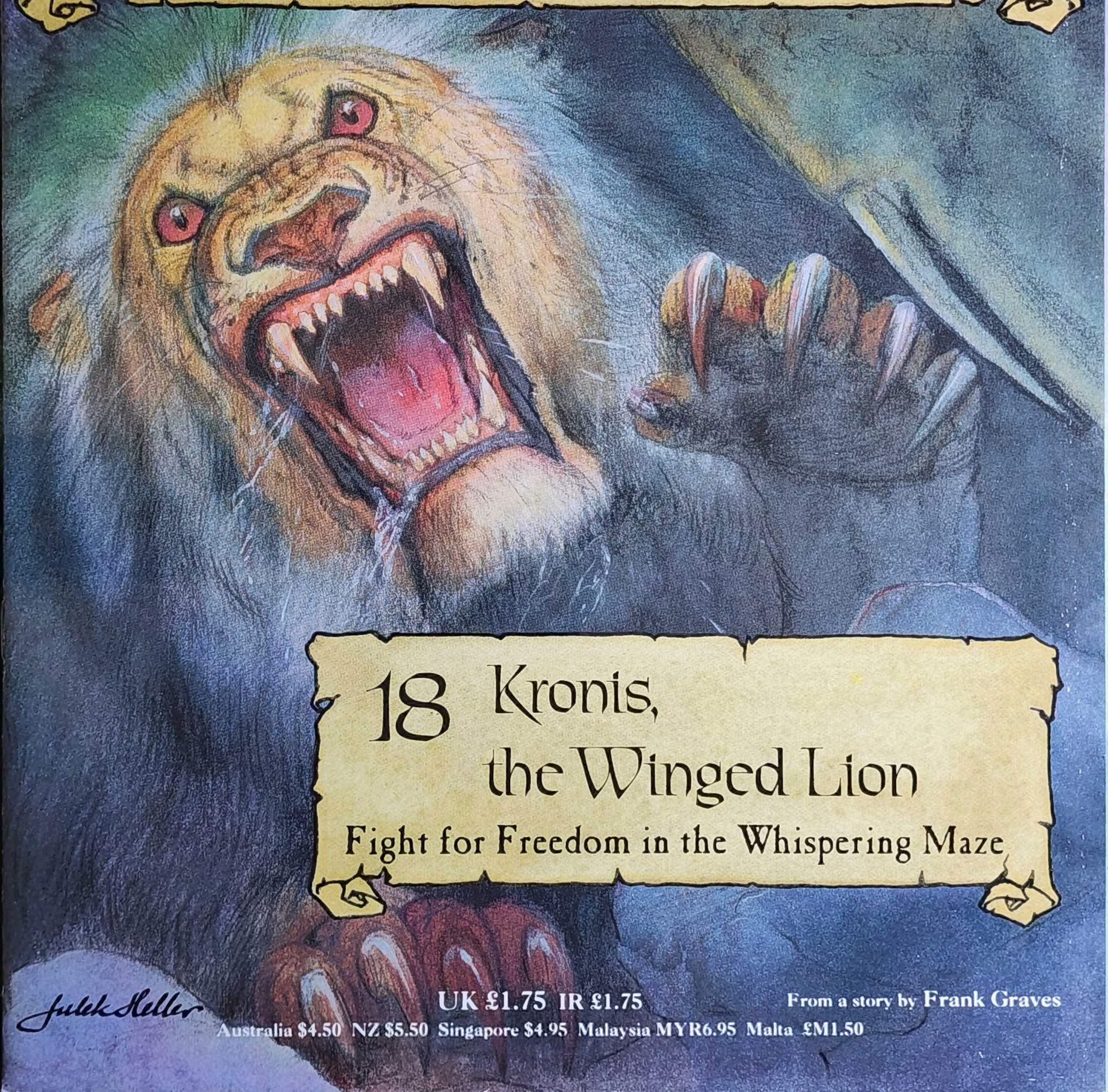
A MARSHALL CAVENDISH COLLECTION 18 IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS



18 Kronis, the Winged Lion

Fight for Freedom in the Whispering Maze

Julek Heller

UK £1.75 IR £1.75

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From a story by Frank Graves

On the Eighteenth Day . . .

A treasure now regains its sheen
When past water thrice has been,
Leads them streetwise through a maze
To a hero's captured gaze.
Return with rope to lead him out,
But death of evil is in doubt.
Who once was brave is braver now.
Fight the waves from stern to prow.

Heavy waves rocked the little boat, awakening the three companions with a jolt. They were lost at sea. Gripping the gunwales, they watched as first the prow of the boat, then they themselves, vanished into thin air. It was as if a curtain of invisibility was being dragged along the length of the boat. One moment, the current swelled and the next the sea was empty.

Then the canoe was back in the sea again. Before the companions, across suddenly calm waters, lay an island. They had passed through a web of illusion into a realm undetectable from outside.

Isle of illusions

"This must be the land of dreams the prophecy mentioned before," Richard mused, as he surveyed the island ahead.

A colossal arch straddled the approaches to a harbour and the current was pushing them towards it. They shipped paddles and waited until their prow bumped against the harbour walls.

The three clambered ashore and Orkan made the boat fast. At the far end of the waterfront stood an ancient lighthouse, and beyond the quayside stretched a network of narrow streets. They were deserted, yet Richard had an eerie feeling that something was there. Fluid shadows slipped and slid around the buildings every time he looked.

Ferocious feline

The trio strode into a street lined with the remains of grand houses. As they moved ahead, Richard heard a flapping sound from above. He looked up. Flying at them out of the sun was a monstrous winged lion.

"Run!" Richard shouted.

The three sprinted into one of the mansions. They just made it to safety before a thunderous blow rocked the house, sending them

sprawling on the floor. A second impact followed the first as the lion charged against the outer wall. Then the beast tried a different tactic. He reached a paw inside the room, sending the three running to the end of the hall. The lion's paw scrabbled around, but could not find its prey. The lion gave up. With a loud roar, it flew off into the sky.

Huddled in a corner, the trio waited for the coast to clear, then looked at the *Book of Prophecies*.

"A treasure?" Richard said thoughtfully, taking the amulet out of his pocket. Its old spark and glow were back.

"The prophecy's right," he exclaimed. "Regains a treasure its sheen! It's the third time we've crossed water, and the amulet's back to normal!"

"What about the rest?" Melek asked.

"I'd say we have to find someone in a maze, somewhere in these streets."

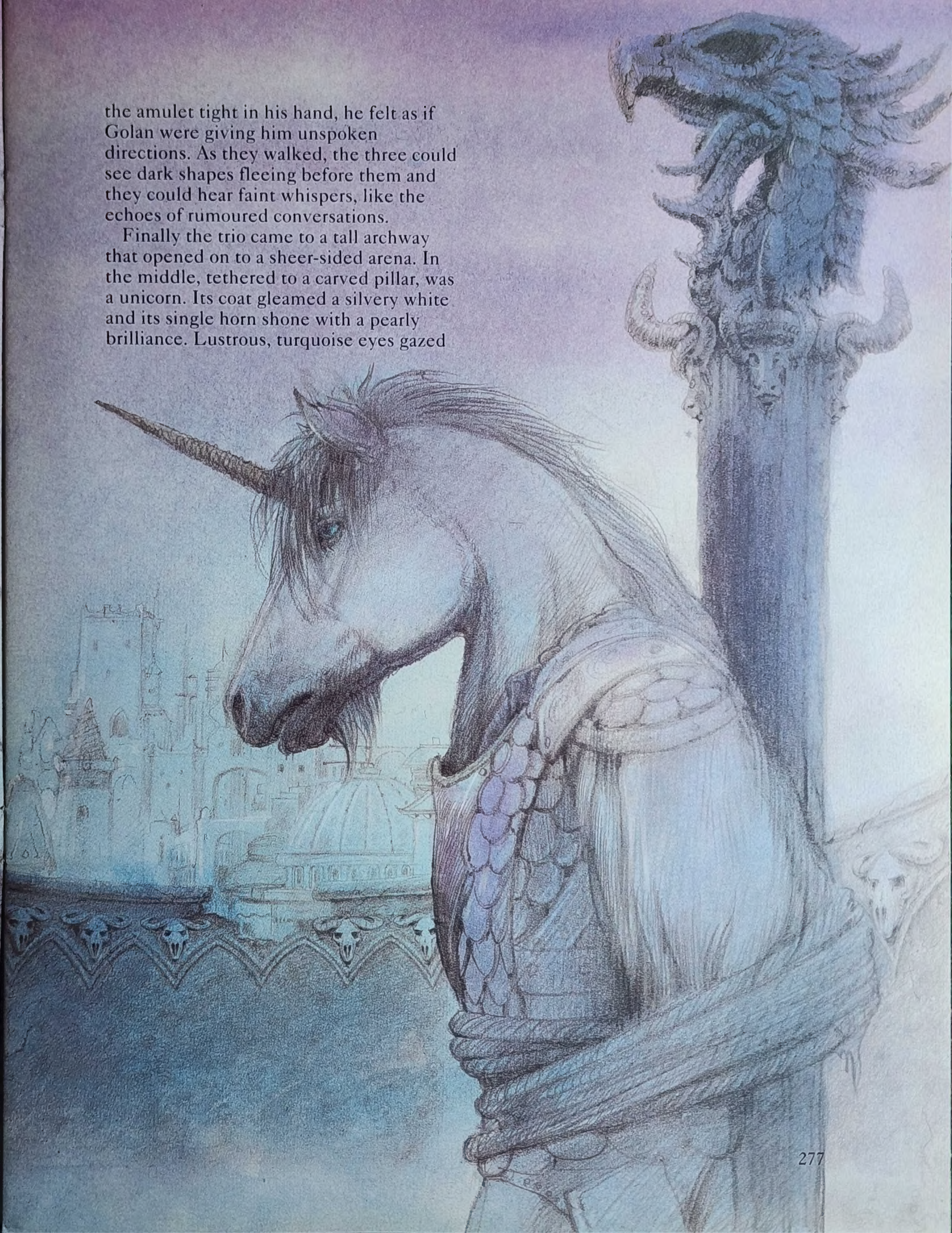
Tethered unicorn

The trio left the house and darted from door to door, in case they had to make a quick escape. At the end of the street, their way was blocked by a high wall in which was set a heavy door. It swung open before Richard's touch, to reveal a maze of arched corridors, that led to further mysterious corridors.

The three marched through the door. Richard seemed sure of the way. Gripping

the amulet tight in his hand, he felt as if Golan were giving him unspoken directions. As they walked, the three could see dark shapes fleeing before them and they could hear faint whispers, like the echoes of rumoured conversations.

Finally the trio came to a tall archway that opened on to a sheer-sided arena. In the middle, tethered to a carved pillar, was a unicorn. Its coat gleamed a silvery white and its single horn shone with a pearly brilliance. Lustrous, turquoise eyes gazed



nervously at the three strangers.

"It's all right, we've come to rescue you," Richard said as he drew near. He told the unicorn who he was and held up Golan's amulet as if to prove his identity.

"I am Tuska, Guardian of the Mythical Beasts," the unicorn said with obvious relief. "Kronis, the winged lion, made me his prisoner and took my halberd and dagger – only they can cut me free."

"We've seen Kronis already," Orkan said briefly.

"You've done well to escape him then," Tuska said, "a single scratch from his claws delivers enough poison to kill an army."

The three shuddered at the thought.

"Where are your weapons?" Richard asked. "We'll get them back for you."

"In Kronis's lair, on top of the old lighthouse near the harbour. Beware though," Tuska warned, "Kronis keeps a close eye on his domain. He'll be waiting for you."

They bade farewell and ran to the door.

"Did you notice any shadows following us?" Richard asked as they started off.

"Yes," Melek said, "some of the shapes looked like the incredible beasts described in Morbane's book."

"How are we going to find our way back?" Orkan cut in sharply.

Richard thought for a moment. "We'll tie one end of the rope to the side of the archway and unwind it as we go," he said.

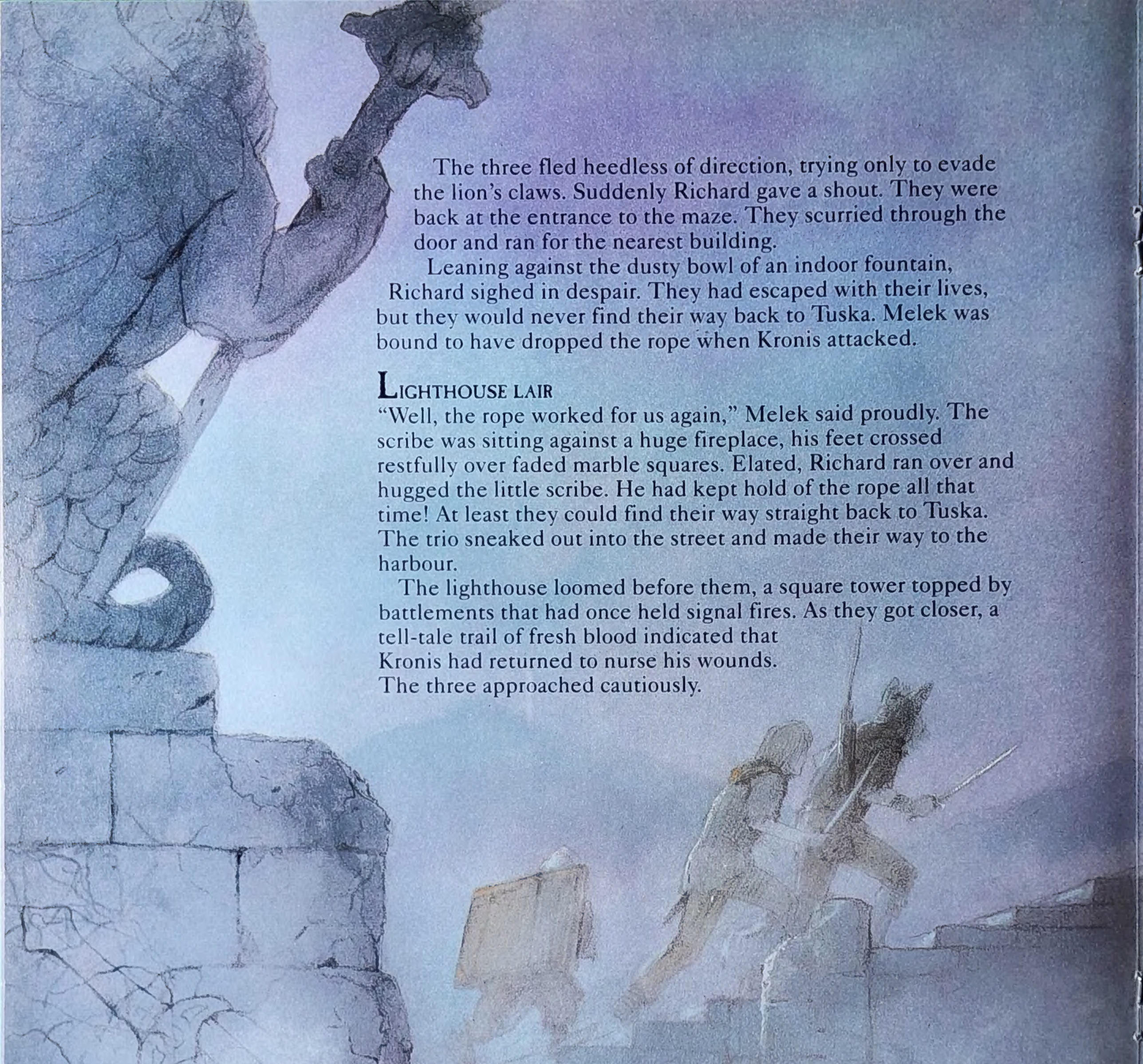
Melek's rope had stretched miraculously before, maybe it would do so again. Then they could follow it back to Tuska once they had found his weapons.

As Richard suspected, the rope did stretch. It snaked out and lengthened behind them as they struggled back along the way they had come.

Kronis attacks

For a while, Richard's memory seemed to be holding up. Then they came to a corridor that nobody recognized. They were lost. Richard was about to lead them back along the rope when a familiar shadow descended upon them. Kronis was back.

They ran for their lives, twisting and turning along strange corridors, all the time trying to throw off their pursuer. He had the advantage. At one terrible moment, they were cornered in a dead-end. Luckily the space was tight, and their flashing daggers sharp. Unable to manoeuvre, Kronis retreated with blood gushing from the pads of his paws.



The three fled heedless of direction, trying only to evade the lion's claws. Suddenly Richard gave a shout. They were back at the entrance to the maze. They scurried through the door and ran for the nearest building.

Leaning against the dusty bowl of an indoor fountain, Richard sighed in despair. They had escaped with their lives, but they would never find their way back to Tuska. Melek was bound to have dropped the rope when Kronis attacked.

Lighthouse lair

"Well, the rope worked for us again," Melek said proudly. The scribe was sitting against a huge fireplace, his feet crossed restfully over faded marble squares. Elated, Richard ran over and hugged the little scribe. He had kept hold of the rope all that time! At least they could find their way straight back to Tuska. The trio sneaked out into the street and made their way to the harbour.

The lighthouse loomed before them, a square tower topped by battlements that had once held signal fires. As they got closer, a tell-tale trail of fresh blood indicated that Kronis had returned to nurse his wounds. The three approached cautiously.

An old, weatherbeaten door barred entry to the lighthouse.

"You stay here," Richard ordered Melek. "You haven't got a dagger and you'll only be in the way."

Richard and Orkan pushed open the door and started up a narrow staircase that climbed up the side of the wall. There was no rail, so they kept close to the wall, away from the central well that reached from the bottom to the top of the tower.

Confronting Kronis

Richard drew his dagger and Orkan strung an arrow. Running up the remaining treads, they burst into Kronis's lair.

The lion was in one corner, licking his wounded paws. Beside him lay Tuska's halberd and dagger. Orkan moved like lightning. His first arrow struck Kronis's hind leg. His second hit him where his right wing joined the body. The lion reared up in pain.

Then Richard showed true valour. Despite the lion's lethal claws, he was determined to get back the weapons that could free the Guardian. He darted forth and sliced his sword to and fro to

fend off Kronis's paws. As the lion roared in agony, Richard snatched up the halberd and dagger, then ran back to the top of the stairs as a hail of arrows sped from Orkan's bow. One sank deep into Kronis's lung. Another pierced his throat.

Orkan quickly shouldered his bow and followed Richard down the stairs. Casting a backward glance, he saw Kronis pluck the arrows from his hide and scrabble in their direction.

Cutting the bonds

Orkan and Richard ran down the stairs and crashed through the door, dizzy and panting. Pulling Melek behind them, they made their way back to the maze entrance.

They followed the rope back to Tuska's arena. Richard rushed forward, prepared to hack away at the coils with Tuska's dagger, but it sliced through the thick rope with magical ease. When the Guardian was free, Richard handed him the halberd and dagger.

Leaving Tuska no time to stretch his stiffened limbs, Orkan shouted for them to move. "Kronis is still alive. I saw him crawling after us," he warned.

Cloak of shadows

The four of them ran from the arena. Melek collected the rope as he went. In the same manner as it had stretched, it now shrank miraculously. When they finally came out of the maze, the rope had regained its old length.

As the four came in sight of the old lighthouse, a host of shadows seemed to materialize around them. Kronis had managed to crawl down the stairs. The thickening shadows advanced upon the wounded monster.

Then Tuska gave out a command, and the lion was smothered by half-formed

shadows that flocked to coat him in a flickering mantle of death. Soon Kronis had disappeared. Richard wondered whether the lion's very life force was being absorbed by the shadows. He watched mesmerized as colour flooded into their bodies and they grew more substantial. Now he could make out the shapes of horned beasts and dragons with enormous wings. Some creatures seemed to be made up of several animals, others bore no resemblance to anything he had ever seen. Tuska seemed to sense his awe and turned to the trio.

Living legends

"These are my forces," the unicorn said. "They are mythical beasts, the half-believed figments of legend. This is our city, but when Kronis imprisoned me, my forces became mere shadows. They were left with no strength and no power. Yet you can see them filling out even now. When Kronis dies, they will be flesh again."

Richard was dumbfounded. He signalled to his companions and, with Tuska, the trio walked down to the shore. They climbed into their

boat, and said goodbye. As the unicorn stepped forward to bid them farewell, the emerging army of myth behind him was still gaining in solidity.

Into the Storm

"We'll be seeing you soon," Tuska said as they pushed off from the quay.

The companions paddled as hard as they could. They were deep in thought. As he rowed away, Richard fancied that he could see a strange sea creature becoming real flesh and bone. He did not know quite what force had been released on that strange island – but whatever it was, he was glad it was on their side.

As the three crossed the invisible curtain that separated the island from the rest of the Ancestral World, the sea turned rough. A full-blown storm was brewing. Black waves marched from horizon to horizon, tossing their frail craft brutally across the ocean.

One moment they sloshed in a lightless trough, the next they balanced on a peak, staring in terror at near-vertical slopes. Their paddles made little impact against such conditions and their boat was filling with water. When they embarked on this journey they had been nearly sunk by illusion. Now it seemed as if they were going to sink in reality.

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

This friendly pair have come out of hiding to see what is going on in the Whispering Maze, so they are not too difficult to spot this time!

In issue 17, Shoomi and Shoobi were hiding on page 262.

3-Minute Challenge

Tuska's Weapons

The Guardian's halberd and dagger are hidden somewhere in the illustrations. Can you spot them in less than three minutes?

In issue 17, the pod was hidden on page 265.

Life Force Pod

As you read this issue, watch out for a clue that will tell you which pod Richard found in the Shadow Swamps.

Monsters and Magic

When you have finished reading about Kronis, look at Morbane's story cards and find out about the Griffin and the Minotaur. Which of these creatures do you think Kronis is based on?

In issue 17, Gator was based on Sebek.

Check your answers in the next issue.

The Ancestral Trail

Cut out the location recorder and six Pods for the role-playing game. Wait for the six Intercept cards in the next issue and you will be ready to play!

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Colour by Bright Arts Ltd. Typeset Output by Litho Link Ltd. Printed in Great Britain.

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AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS
19 Nemis, Master of the Deep
In the Merman's Underwater Prison
Julek Heller

In Issue 19

Nemis, Master of the Deep

Seeking safety aboard a deserted ship, the trio find a ghostly welcome. Then they are pulled to the sea floor where the Merman King has a nasty surprise in store for them.

plus

- Morbane warns about sweet-voiced temptresses whose songs mean death to all who hear them.
- More tokens and six Intercept cards for **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game.

Coming in Issue 20

Spector, Keeper of the Ice Kingdom

In a fabulous ice palace, the trio are captured by a one-eyed giant. Can they avoid the evil monster's all-seeing gaze and escape from Frigoria?

plus

From Morbane – two stories about creatures with a watchful eye, or more! • Two pieces for the Ancestral World puzzle map.

ISBN 0-7485-4202-7
9 780748 542024